

The Urban League of Portland and Education

Education for people of color in Portland, OR during the late 1980's showed a lot of progress when compared to earlier times. A lot of this progress didn't come always come from improved classrooms and better quality education. A lot of the progress made came from programs created for disadvantaged students and families of color. This alternative way of combatting the oppression colored families faced was very successful and paved the way for future programs that wanted to battle the same oppressions. There were two major programs created to fight the oppression towards people of color were the Adolescent Parent Treatment Program and The Whitney Young Learning Center. Both programs, connected in many ways, provided the extra help needed outside the classroom to promote a better future for students of color.

The Adolescent Parent Treatment program (APT) was created to help students of color and their families living in Multnomah County and North/Northeast Portland overcome the obstacles of being a delinquent in the Juvenile Justice System. "African Americans were reported to be among the highest percentage of adolescents represented in the Juvenile Justice System".¹ In the cases of juvenile sex offenders, there were no programs in place that provided treatment for their offense and helped deal with the aftercare of being released from the Juvenile Justice system. There was a strong need for a program that was designed with the intent to provide treatment for juvenile offenders and aftercare to prevent reoffending. The juvenile court in Portland, OR stated that "a program in place could influence greatly on the amount of sexual reoffenders among Juvenile delinquents."²

¹ Cawthorne, "Executive Summary of the Adolescent Parent Treatment Program", Box 5, Teen-Parent Program folder, Page 1

² Gonzalez, "APT program information", Box 5, Teen-Parent Program folder, Page 12

The program's focus was to target high risk juveniles, mostly males between ages of 12-17. The juvenile would have at least one felony, or 3 misdemeanors, or a combination of the two. They specifically targeted minorities that fit the above criteria because of how overrepresented minorities are in the system. In the grant proposal, Cawthorne discusses the absolute need for a program such as APT and points out numerous times the importance of providing treatment and aftercare for juvenile sex offenders. In the proposal, the main goal of the program is to provide "comprehensive culturally specific family treatment and supervision model to reduce the incidence of delinquent behavior".³

Within APT, a subprogram is created called Sex Abuse Treatment and Aftercare (SATA). It was designed to provide the extensive treatment needed to integrate juvenile sex offenders back into the education system and into society while improving their overall outlook on life. Some of the things provided in the program were individual and family counseling, as well as parent education for the parents involved. Within SATA is a DDI or Developmentally Delayed Impact group; it is a special program created to help those within SATA that had troubles with reading and writing. This would allow them to provide a more video based treatment to those Juvenile Offenders that couldn't read or write. The APT and its subprograms worked very closely with the schools involved to make for an easier transition from the program back into school. This entire program was designed to cover all the bases needed in order to show that they were capable of helping change not only the attitudes but the mindsets behind Juvenile Offenders and Sex Offenders. The programs proposal asked for about 200k in funds and received just north of 170k for the 1987-1988 year.

³ Gonzalez, "Application for Juvenile Services Commission Grant", Box 5 Teen-Parent Program folder, Page 1

After the first year of the APT program, an analysis showed outstanding results among the clients that were provided treatment. “It’s shortfalls were the underutilization of the program and was the only real problem that needed to be addressed.”⁴ The clients that were given treatment responded very well and showed that a little bit of extra help greatly increases the client’s ability to properly function in a school setting and greatly reduced the risk of the clients reoffending. Six clients were analyzed to track the progress the program was making. All but one client went on to live normal lives in the school systems and completely refrained from reoffending. The creation of this program showed that community intervention was necessary in fighting the battle against the oppression people of color still faced in the education system during the late 1980’s. This success continues for these clients as they were referred to another community-action program upon completion of treatment called the Whitney Young Learning Center.

The Whitney Young Learning Center started in 1972 and was a free, homework assistance, community based after-school program for grades 7-12. They offered “special education activities, weekly discussions, guest speakers, self-discipline contests, cultural awareness, student newsletters and worked on building self-esteem.”⁵ They operated Monday-Thursday from 3pm-8pm and even though they faced difficulties reaching out to students and providing enough materials, they still made a big difference in the community. They were constantly trying to find new ways to reach out to the minority youth and get them to attend this Youth Center. The substantial academic improvement the center saw among the students that attended prompted them make bigger and bigger efforts. In 1986, a proposal was presented that had

⁴ Gonzalez, “Juvenile Services Program” Box 5, Teen-Parent Program folder, p.2

⁵ Urban League, “An Information Guide” Box 5, Whitney Young LC folder, p.1

potential to attract many more students than before. They wanted to involve the NBA and use the Blazer House to “Provide a permanent space for the expansion of WYLC services to meet the educational needs of the community...It will provide a non-threatening, non-institutional atmosphere that is warm and personable.”⁶ They had this idea in mind that if they create a place that feels less like another school, more students that need help academically would be more inclined to show up and receive the help they needed. They also proposed to involve the Blazers directly, using spontaneous appearances and ticket-winning contests to keep students showing up and participating. The program gained national attention for its success and even received praise from President Bill Clinton in 1997. The WYLC held high standards and high expectations for its students and that ultimately lead them to a lot of success.

The press became involved by writing articles that praised the students for taking the extra time to be apart of WYLC. The Oregonian released the article “An Urban League Salute to Whitney Young Learning Center Students”. It discussed the learning center’s “demanding expectations and constant encouragement to become self-disciplined and self-reliant.”⁷ They posted the names of the students who came to the center constantly and praised them for their commitment and dedication. A good chunk of the students that went to the center went off to college or graduated high school better prepared for the work force.

These programs showed great improvement for minority students. With the establishment of these types of programs, the battle against oppression among minority students became one that could be fought and potentially won. The APT and WYLC were key examples that community intervention can really go a long way. These programs really make the saying “It takes a village to raise a child” come to life.

⁶ Cochrane & Cawthorne, “Blazer House Concept for WYLC” July 1986. Box 5 WYLC folder, p. 3

⁷Urban League, “An UL Salute to WYLC Students” Box 5, WYLC folder, p. 1

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